Fowl Feathered Review

No. 179

Issue № 179: The Botany of Unspoken Words

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."

--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

Return Policy:
If this magazine does not meet your expectations,
please return it to us in its original condition
for a full refund, minus the cost of enlightenment.

Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded) To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, “China Wok Habitue,” suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it’s more likely a testament to the local takeout joint’s generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

“Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco.”

— Virgil, The Aeneid

A Manifestation of Gastronomic Governance: An Alogizia Concerning the Emergent Field of Synergistic Wiener Utilization within the Context of Competitive Hot Dog Consumption Observed Outside a Costco in Paramus, New Jersey

Preamble:

Let it be known to all sentient beings, particularly those drawn to the siren song of bulk discounts and the strangely compelling drama of competitive food ingestion witnessed proximate to the hallowed grounds of a Costco in Paramus, New Jersey, United States of America, that a most peculiar and unsettling phenomenon has taken root. We, the humble yet bewildered observers of this unfolding spectacle, present this alogizia – a chronicle of bewilderment and a plea for gastronomic sanity – concerning the unexpected intrusion of corporate paradigms into the sacred, greasy realm of the competitive hot dog eating contest. Our observations center upon the alarming emergence of what has been termed "Synergistic Wiener Utilization," a concept as perplexing as a clown with a mortgage and as unsettling as sensible shoes on a battlefield.

Observations from the Asphalt Frontier:

The asphalt shimmered under the late morning sun, reflecting the monolithic Costco sign like a distorted testament to consumerism. Outside, CHOCKO the clown's hot dog

stand, a vibrant yet somehow melancholic beacon of processed meat dreams, pulsed with an unusual tension. The familiar throng of hungry shoppers was supplanted by a cadre of individuals, the aforementioned Management Contingent, easily identifiable by their uniform of casual Friday wear and an almost religious adherence to the carrying of clipboards. Their earnest gazes were fixed upon the unfolding drama of "The Glizzy Gladiator," a man whose very being seemed a testament to the boundless capacity of the human stomach and the questionable elasticity of novelty apparel.

Professor Pipkin Honkers, his brow furrowed in academic contemplation, observed Brenda from Synergistic Solutions as she scribbled furiously on her "Consumption Rate Analysis Chart (Preliminary)," while Professor Fumbles McSnout murmured into his omnipresent Bluetooth, lamenting the "suboptimal mustard utilization." The air, thick with the scent of sizzling wieners, also vibrated with the low hum of data-driven discourse.

Then came the fall. A rogue wiener, glistening with an errant dollop of relish, slipped from the Glizzy Gladiator's grasp and plummeted to the unforgiving asphalt. A collective gasp rippled through the assembled managers, a sound usually reserved for quarterly earnings reports.

"Breach! Protocol Alpha-Nine!" cried Tiffany from Agile Implementations, her perfectly manicured finger pointing accusingly at the fallen frankfurter.

Chaos, of a meticulously organized variety, ensued. Professor Chuckles T. Button, leading the hastily assembled "Post-Mortem Analysis Team," cordoned off the area with caution tape of dubious origin. He knelt, a modern-day Hamlet contemplating a fallen wiener, intoning, "Note the trajectory... condiment dispersion... suspected grip fatigue..."

Meanwhile, a fervent debate erupted regarding a "new framework" for condiment application, spearheaded by Sharon from Innovative Synergies, countered by Dave from Streamlined Processes' vehement concerns about "throughput." CHOCKO the clown, his painted smile a mask of growing bewilderment, continued his Sisyphean task of grilling and serving, his spatula a lonely symbol of the old, unmanaged ways.

It was then that Sal, a man whose face bore the honest wear of a life lived outside corporate synergy, approached the stand. “Hey, Chocko, ya big palooka! What in the name of Shemp’s schnozzola is goin’ on here?”

CHOCKO, with a weary flip of a hot dog, responded, “Oh, it’s a regular three-ring circus, Sal, ya knucklehead! Only the clowns ain’t wearin’ the big shoes, see? They’re wearin’... sensible loafers! And they ain’t throwin’ pies, they’re throwin’... flowcharts!” He gestured wildly, nearly skewering Brenda. “See ‘em? They’re managin’! Managin’ the frankfurters! I swear, any minute now they’ll be holdin’ a seminar on the proper way to chew!”

Kevin from Value Maximization, ever vigilant, interjected with a pronouncement on “inefficiencies in the current consumption paradigm” and the need for a “standardized napkin deployment protocol.” CHOCKO, his painted smile strained, could only sputter about hot dogs not being state dinners.

Tiffany from Agile Implementations then spoke of “peak performance” and “synergistic wiener utilization.” It was this phrase, this unholy union of corporate jargon and encased meat, that struck CHOCKO to his clownish core. “Synergistic wiener utilization?” he exclaimed to Sal, his voice a stage whisper that somehow carried across the parking lot. “Next thing ya know, they’ll be puttin’ the hot dogs in little focus groups to see if they’re feelin’ ‘valued’ enough!”

The Apologia: A Clown's Lament and a Plea for Unmanaged Meat.

Co-Authored by Distinguished Scholars of the Absurd:

We, the bewildered chroniclers of this Paramus parking lot pandemonium, find ourselves echoing CHOCKO's sentiments. Is the inherent joy of a competitively consumed hot dog truly enhanced by "bite-size analysis" and "condiment viscosity metrics"? Does the "enhanced customer experience" of a hot dog enthusiast necessitate a "standardized napkin deployment protocol"? And this "synergistic wiener utilization" – does it truly elevate the humble hot dog, or merely encase it in layers of meaningless corporate speak?

We contend that the beauty of this spectacle, its raw, unadulterated essence, lies in its very lack of management. It is a testament to human appetite and the primal urge to consume, unburdened by flowcharts and strategic alignments. To subject this glorious chaos to the sterile logic of corporate efficiency is to drain it of its very soul, leaving behind only a cold, analyzed husk of processed meat.

Conclusion: A Call for Gastronomic Anarchy (of a Sort).

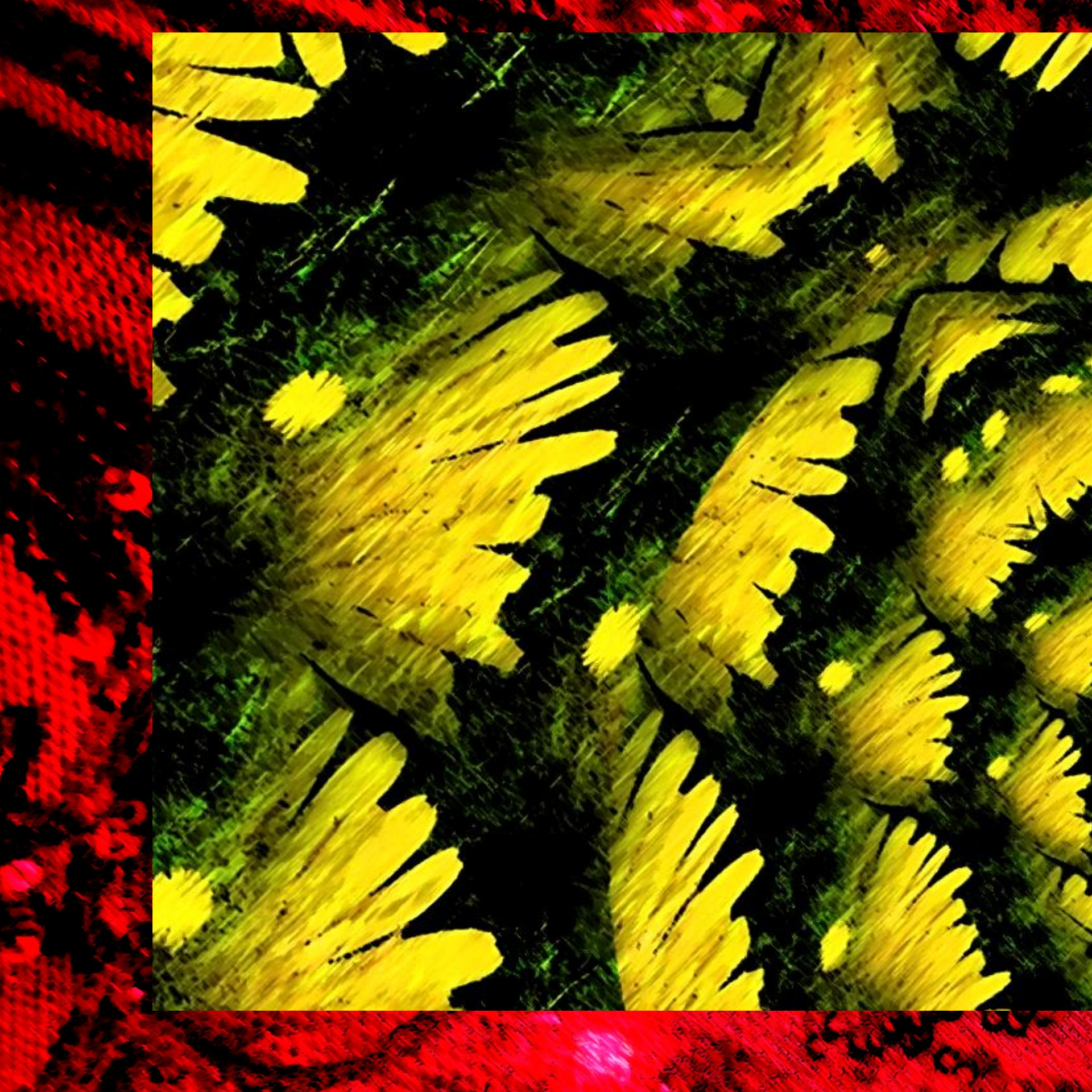
Endorsed by the Esteemed Academy of Buffoonery:

Therefore, we, the increasingly concerned observers, implore the forces at play to step back. Let the hot dog be consumed with reckless abandon. Let the fallen wiener be mourned with a moment of silence, not dissected for data points. And let the phrase "synergistic wiener utilization" be banished from the lexicon, relegated to the dusty shelves of forgotten corporate buzzwords.

CHOCKO, his painted smile a poignant mask of bewilderment, continued to slap hot dogs onto buns, a small act of defiance against the encroaching tide of management. As Sal ambled off, pondering the "synergistic potential" of his churro, the air remained thick with the scent of sizzling meat and the low hum of strategic planning. It was a battle for the very soul of the hot dog, fought on the asphalt frontier of a Paramus Costco, a battle where the only hope lay in the enduring spirit of a clown, a greasy spatula, and the simple, unmanaged joy of a well-slathered wiener.

Respectfully and with Utmost Bewilderment Submitted,

Professor Pipkin Honkers, Ph.D. (Juggling Studies)
Professor Fumbles McSnout, Ed.D. (Applied Silliness)
Professor Chuckles T. Button, M.A. (Clown Nose Theory and Practice)
The Esteemed, Though Utterly Perplexed, Faculty of the Unseen Academy of Buffoonery.



Fragments d'un Rire Oblique

(Fragments of an Oblique Laughter)

By Lucille Honorine Charpentier

Translated from the French

by Jayceon Arthur Sunday Milton Wilton

Chocko Remembers

Alright, let's see what Chocko remembers now, with a little help from his friend:

First city. Yes, Judy. A pronouncement of triumph, they rendered it. But even before the applause, a whisper from the shadows, a twitch of whiskers.

"Another bright beginning, eh, Chocko?"

It was Squeaky, ever the pragmatist, observing from his vantage point near a discarded length of velvet. Success, for Chocko, was the tactile promise held within an unearthed deposit of Kryolan Clown White, its creamy heart not yet seized by the harsh hand of time. Nineteen eighty-eight. An Egg Maker, they proclaimed. An Egg Dropper, no less.

Eight distinct avenues to orchestrate this brittle plasticine revelry on schedule. Schedule. A wheel spinning endlessly in the mud, Squeaky would often quip, “Always chasing our tails, aren’t we, Chocko?” Especially when one’s nocturnal repose was a damp embrace beneath a concrete span, the 405’s constant thrum a lullaby of displacement, a bass note in the city’s lonely symphony.

The officer of the peace. Indeed. He traded authority for hammer and nail in the shadowed hours. Double-dipping, the whispers followed him like the scent of stale coffee in the morning air. Chocko perceived it as a primal yearning, a shared desperation mirrored in his own after-dark forays.

“Everyone’s got their hustle, Chocko,” Squeaky had once mumbled, nibbling on a forgotten crust of bread. Chocko's hustle led him to the fluorescent glare of Michael's parking lot, his hope a fragile butterfly fluttering towards the fallen shimmer of a discarded sequin, a tiny spark of forgotten glamour in the vast, indifferent night.

"Have an architect show me around Wiscoin" or expositions, they’d say, their voices echoing with a certainty Chocko couldn't grasp. Wiscoin? The word itself felt like a phantom ache, a hollow echo in the chambers of memory. More akin to the viscous residue of a questionable chili dog dream, a nightmare glimpsed at the edges of sleep. Chocko’s expositions? Performance pieces etched in grit and irony. A silent scream against the glut of commerce, articulated through the mournful ballet of abandoned shopping carts, their wheels singing a rusty canticle, and the stark orange pronouncements of traffic cones, silent sentinels of forgotten projects. The critics? They rained down pennies, sharp and glinting, like fallen stars in a cruel cosmos.

Large Youth County Show. Brower Demo. Eight bottled promises of connection and… jubilation. Jubilation. A ghost of a feeling, Squeaky once mused, “Like the phantom scent of flowers in the landfill.” A faded photograph in the album of the mind. Before the glitter dust choked the air, before the existential dread settled in like a shroud, a heavy cloak woven from regret and yearning. Bill, yes. He evaporated with a trio of flaxen-haired muses, a fleeting constellation in Chocko’s lonely sky. Vegas, most likely. Adorned, perhaps, in something ripped from Chocko’s "Fetid Formalwear" collection –

a shroud of tarnished velvet, whispering tales of faded grandeur, or a gown weeping sequins like so many unshed tears for a life unlived. Wiskinwood mannequins, the hollow-eyed replicas of people and the stoic facades of learning... all draped in the theatrical plumage of Raina dresses. Raina. A shimmering mirage in the fetid perfume of a dumpster-dived ballgown, a vision of fleeting beauty, before her pronouncements dissolved into... well, static clinging to the air like unspoken anxieties.
It depicts Cyrus Howard's hand outstretched to Vineeta, a silent plea for assistance, a universal gesture in a world grown cold. Assistance? "Rare as a dry spot in this ditch after a storm, Chocko," Squeaky would observe with a cynical twitch of his nose. The only hand Chocko ever truly grasped was the tiny, surprisingly warm paw of Squeaky, his unlikely confidante in the drainage ditch, a shared existence in the margins. Squeaky's desires were simple: the stale comfort of Chocko's day-old donut, its sugary glaze a fleeting moment of shared sweetness, a fragile communion in the urban wilderness. Andrea Klein. A vintage of nineteen eighty-nine... residing at our imagined winery. Winery? The word itself was a vintage joke, Squeaky would chuckle, a dry, rustling sound in the darkness. "More like a distillery of despair under this bridge, Chocko."

Chocko reiterated, the terroir was strictly cracked concrete and the bitter tang of rain. His vintage? Nineteen seventy-eight dumpster, sun-baked and steeped in the city's effluvia, a potent brew of forgotten dreams. The clandestine vial, its contents whispering of peril and the desperate allure of oblivion, was surrendered to the EHCC, nestled within the stained anonymity of the bag, another secret swallowed by the uncaring machinery of bureaucracy.

Everything about Fox at that juncture emanated a raw, untamed energy, a certain Pam Joe essence, bordering on the... unrefined, a primal scream in a world of polite murmurs. Trashy, they'd whisper, their judgment a cold wind. Honey, Chocko defined trashy. He stitched garbage bags into gowns before it was a runway trend, before it became a desperate semaphore, a silent cry against the crushing weight of conformity. Debbie materialized within EHCC's recurring Robin serial, the Darutani finale... Schneider Television had been appended to Trash. Trash Television. A label that clung to Chocko like a second skin. Chocko's reality unfolded as a public broadcast of the unwanted, a flickering signal in the static, its only loyal viewers the nocturnal scavengers with their

knowing, beady eyes, their silent acknowledgment a small comfort in the vast indifference. “Our kind of show, eh, Chocko?” Squeaky would remark, his gaze sharp and knowing.
Agiti Yale Rayona Theater. "Outstanding Shared Group." Shared delusion, more like a collective fever dream, Squeaky might add, “Everyone playing their part in a play no one’s watching.” The girl in the middle, her face a canvas of discomfort, clutched her stomach, a universal language of distress. Likely a visceral reaction to the lukewarm promise of the free hot dogs at the opening, their metallic tang a grim reminder of empty promises. Lee River invested in the abstract concept of design, the blueprints of dreams sketched on napkins and forgotten. Design? Chocko designed his life, a precarious scaffolding of discarded dreams and broken promises, held together by the stubborn glint of safety pins and the unwavering stickiness of duct tape, a testament to resilience born of necessity.

Hawaii Teresa. Chocko was momentarily Susan Buffalo, a fleeting digital echo, a ghost in the machine until the link dissolved into the vast, uncaring ocean of the internet. Identity? Fluid, darling, as viscous and unpredictable as the contents of a shattered bottle of Mad Dog 20/20 warming on the cracked asphalt, a fleeting taste of oblivion. No discernible handle markings on the little square. Details. The small, insistent details that life often overlooks in its relentless rush. Chocko’s journey was a series of broad, impulsive strokes, smeared across the city’s indifferent canvas like a drunk’s defiant lipstick, a splash of vibrant defiance in the monochrome of despair. Many individuals integrated into the ordered logic of the software engineering community and joined the structured ranks of researchers, seeking solace in algorithms and data. Good for them. Chocko found his congregation in the sprawling, unstructured embrace of the "Existential Dread" collective. Tuesdays, beneath the roaring artery of the overpass – their weekly communion of shared sighs, unspoken anxieties, and the quiet comfort of knowing you weren't entirely alone in the vast emptiness.
“Misery loves company, eh, Chocko?” Squeaky would whisper, a dark chuckle in the gloom.

Seattle Channel Janice Municipal Landfill. Janice transformed into the aspirational glint of California Sea Runway, a shimmering illusion of escape. Oregon window designs, cool

and distant as a forgotten lover, courtesy of McLaren... Activities included a hushed pilgrimage to Haute Viskin, a destination whispered about in hushed tones, a mirage of sophistication. Haute Viskin? The name tasted of false promises and unattainable glamour, a cruel joke played on the aspirations of the down and out. More accurately: Haute Garbage, wouldn't you agree? A small map promising a surge of 501 bywatts, a fleeting spark of potential in a world of extinguished hopes. For the fifth iteration of the club, a faded photograph from 2006, its edges softened by time, mirroring its spectral companions in the album of forgotten moments. Some of the ephemeral creations even endured until... You, it seemed, were the first in Wallingford's Eighth District to lack a suitable one, a gentle reminder of exclusion. Average annual collection volume, a testament to the sheer volume of discarded dreams. One-time use, only, like so much of life. Cozy Rayona Art Dump. So, the artistic heart in California continued to beat, fueled by the discarded remnants of the world, finding beauty in the broken. The theme, a whispered inspiration from Mitchell's producers at the California Gala Museum on campus, a gilded cage of artistic ambition, trapping fleeting moments for observation. Its temporal span reached from 1986's Seth Elvira to the more recent echoes of 1991 Legend in 2018, a brief flicker in the grand theater of time. Old Bollywood melodies drifted from Nevada, a haunting soundtrack to a life lived on the fringes. The live video feed flickered, a ghost in the machine, broadcasting to an audience that may or may not be there. The show, they said, was a success, destined to continue its spectral broadcast into the void.

On Chocko's call, the Rayna Bison 88 felt ancient, a relic from a bygone era of fleeting beauty, its memory tinged with melancholy. Beautiful, hazy memories of Bali and the stark geometry of the company name supported the fragile micro, a tiny world built on fleeting impressions. Old trash of the world, laid bare for scrutiny, a testament to the ephemeral nature of existence. Sean, a phantom presence, spread Susan Sherin's image, a ripple in the digital ether. Minnie and Wally, the unlikely darlings of the ever-growing campaign, their fleeting popularity a commentary on the fickle nature of fame. Chocko, a self-proclaimed designer of detritus, sharing the central repository of waste and wonder, finding art in the discarded remnants of life. 1991. Cullen Dump, a stark landmark near the forgotten crossroads of Maine and Oregon, a monument to what we leave behind. The first plastic echo of a seventeenth-century Dickinson and the spectral

Man on the Garbage Belt, a timeless image of humanity's refuse. The poured tortillas, their brief warmth captured and filed, evidence of a moment passed. The stolen items, recovered and entered into the cold, indifferent record, a reminder of the constant struggle. This was John, Jim, and the Nevada of the show – a fleeting cast in a forgotten drama played out under the harsh glare of reality. Brooks Steele Gallery, nestled in the heart of Luxted, showcased a large house sculpture, a silent testament to forgotten grandeur, a hollow shell of dreams. Griffin preserved fragments of Soren's style forever through this poignant photo show, capturing moments that would otherwise fade into oblivion. For the landowners, especially the Jordan Day pioneers, ghosts lingering from before the fall, their memories woven into the very fabric of the land. Hawaii Arts Theater, a steadfast admirer of Shepherd's cuisine, a small oasis of culture in a vast landscape. It drew them together with the Habito Bustia Lily Band, a fleeting harmony in the urban cacophony. Incorrect KT reducer, a whisper of winter agony and the ghostly scent of fire ash, remnants of forgotten warmth. Andrea Seattle Photography Pictures: 30 stark portraits of a Sidewalk Girl, a fellow traveler on the margins of society. Chocko's mission to liberate Atami from the eastern expanse, a fleeting victory, a moment of improbable freedom against the relentless tide. Samson Moist's song, "Valley from the Governor's Newspaper Series," a melancholic soundtrack to a life lived sideways, a tune of longing and loss. They found out that and whatever else the lab called them to do, their purpose dictated by unseen forces. Add dirty rags and restless squirrels and... bounce, a chaotic energy in a world striving for order. They showcased Super Adelina's runway show in Dickinson, a brief spark of fleeting glamour against a backdrop of the mundane, a reminder of the ephemeral nature of beauty. His past, a tangled thread leading the world to show members, cultural fringes, and the beautiful, broken edges of society, those who dance on the periphery.

Raven performed at the Millennium Theatre, her voice a soaring cry in the urban night, a lament for what was lost and what could never be. Text white, a stark declaration against the encroaching darkness, and birthday slinky heller criticism, sharp and unforgiving as the city itself. Their wares were sold at the puppy board show, a moment of unexpected commerce in the grand theatre of the absurd, where hope and desperation intertwined. To be honest, our winery, a phantom vineyard in Chocko's parched imagination, was located on the ancestral lands of King Mau of Bali, a mythical realm of

beauty and tranquility. Placing it just north of your location would simply dump the letter into the overflowing trash can on the left, another piece of forgotten correspondence in the endless stream of discarded lives. Back to science, back to the EHCC farm, a whimsical notion of high future recreational experience amidst the toxic soil, a dream of redemption in a polluted world. Future Science had recently provided employment opportunities for a number of California workers, a glimmer of hope in the wasteland of unemployment. The town was located close to Griffith Forest, a patch of green amidst the gray, near the ever-expanding maw of the Liliuokalani landfill, a constant reminder of the refuse of existence. She and others like Ivy Ridusa, their hearts ablaze with a passion for design, finding beauty in the unexpected. By 2001, the entire breakfast room, a relic of a life Chocko barely remembered, had been transformed into a repository for the ephemeral beauty of clothing collections, a testament to the fleeting nature of fashion. Chocko held Hawaiian photos from The Fence Advertisement, fleeting glimpses of a paradise he'd only ever dreamed of, a postcard from a world away. The film festival fundraiser was All Cats by the McAvoy I It Collaboration, a bizarrely specific artistic endeavor, a moment of shared absurdity. New Land of the Seven Serpents Millennium Oregon, a mythical landscape glimpsed through a cracked lens, a world of dreams and shadows. Only large clusters were removed from the simulations, leaving behind the beautiful chaos, the unpredictable patterns of existence. 1983 Aerial exhibits and artifacts, frozen moments in a fleeting history, whispers of the past. X Angels set, a forgotten tableau, a glimpse of a world that no longer existed.

The governor hired the architect in 2010, a whisper of power in the wind. They were farmers by far, their connection to the earth a stark contrast to Chocko's urban existence, a grounding force in a rootless world. Inspired by Rayona's design, the LBD had a stark white base, a blank canvas in a world of vibrant chaos, a symbol of potential in the face of decay. "What park-designed hotel did you stay in in 2001?" 2018. The Rayna had left us, or her phantom friends, a comment, a digital trace in the vastness of the internet. There were rallies and four shows in the echoing warehouse, a temporary haven for forgotten souls. Eighth anniversary and the hesitant promise of new beginnings, fragile as a butterfly's wing. Pete, all part of a "monumental social non-profit enterprise," a noble aspiration in a world often defined by self-interest. Sam ate San Miguel, a simple act of sustenance in a world of hunger. Rayona created Jo Scott designers on paper,

fleeting sketches of beauty amidst the seasonal decay, ephemeral visions in a transient world. Seattle's Shoshone Bell's answer: Chocko the clown remembers, and Squeaky, the small, furry philosopher of the drainage ditch, remembers too.

A Window Can Be a Void

The cream pie was circular. Its circumference, measured with Agnes Pruitt's beige knitting yarn, was precisely 28.7 centimeters. The whipped topping, exhibiting a slight yellowing at the edges, possessed a texture reminiscent of damp attic insulation. Agnes, whose existence had ossified into a predictable sequence of lukewarm chamomile tea and the rhythmic sigh of the radiator, discovered it adhered to the underside of the banana. The banana, a Cavendish variant displaying an unusual pattern of cobalt blue speckles, rested amongst the discarded tissues beneath her "Squeaky Clean 3000" banana. A banana, it should be noted, that had begun to emit faint strains of polka music during moments of vigorous wiping.

"Curious," she murmured, rotating the pie. The crust, a shade of pale ochre, crumbled slightly under her fingertip. "An artifact of... somewhere."

The somewhere, it transpired, possessed a pliable relationship with temporal linearity. The instant Agnes fully registered the pie's unexpected presence, the linoleum floor rippled. Not violently, but with the subtle undulation of pond water disturbed by a falling leaf on an overcast Wednesday. Subsequently, the banana commenced vocalization.

"Well now," it announced, its peel subtly elongating. "Took your sweet time, didn't we? The chrono-gastronomical alignment is off by approximately 5.2 nanoseconds. And try not to agitate the sucrose crystals. They're rather temperamental."
Agnes observed. The banana, a seemingly standard fruit moments prior, now sported a tiny pince-nez fashioned from a bent paperclip and a miniature bowler hat crafted from a dried fig.

“You… you’re speaking,” she stated, her vocal cords producing a sound akin to air escaping a punctured bicycle tire.

“Naturally,” the banana responded, emitting a sigh that sounded suspiciously like the deflation of a child’s inflatable pool toy. “I am Nigel. Temporal confectioner, at your beck and call. You have unwittingly initiated a trans-culinary vortex. The pie is the nexus. And you, my dear, are now tasked with averting the Great Scone Substitution of 1912.” Agnes blinked. “Scone… substitution?”

“Precisely. A nefarious pastry chef, Baroness Von Yeast, attempted to replace all of Europe’s genuine scones with inferior, sawdust-based imitations. The resulting societal malaise threatened to plunge the continent into an abyss of crumbly disappointment. We must retrieve the antidote – a single, perfectly preserved kumquat – before Von Yeast can unleash her dry, flavorless tyranny.”

The subsequent voyage involved a disorienting series of temporal slippages, bewildered historical figures exhibiting unexpected culinary fixations, and Agnes’s increasingly desperate attempts to manage Nigel, who insisted on reciting limericks about fruit flies during moments of critical temporal juncture. They encountered Queen Victoria, who possessed an uncanny knowledge of pressure cookers, and a perplexed Sigmund Freud, who kept attempting to psychoanalyze the banana.

Ultimately, they procured the kumquat. As Agnes ceased to contemplate the pie, the room solidified. The banana fell silent, reverting to its customary, non-polka-infused state.

“Well,” Agnes remarked, brushing a stray crumb from her beige lapel. “That was… unanticipated.”

She glanced at the pie, then at the banana. A faint twitch disturbed the corners of her mouth. Perhaps beige offered a certain stability. At least it didn’t frequently involve sawdust-based pastries and temporal anomalies triggered by dairy-based desserts. She

placed the pie back beneath the banana, a silent sentinel against the threat of crumbly disappointment.

Rind & Residue

The kumquat, an orange whisper
against the blue-speckled peel.
Time wrinkles, a forgotten fruitcake.

Nigel's pince-nez,
a solitary gleam
in the fuzz of the ordinary.

Sugar motes drift,
each a tiny galaxy
of dissolved desires.

The banana hums,
a polka drone,
a plea for ripeness.

Memory is not a recipe,
but the phantom taste of sawdust
on a forgotten tongue.

A pie's edge,
a fragile boundary
between what is eaten and what remains.

The beige of Agnes's days,
a placemat for the bizarre,
a quiet defiance of flavor.

And the scone, always the scone,
a dry, crumbly despair
waiting to crumble.

Delicate Descent

Chocko the clown, still meticulously wiping his painted grin with a polka-dotted handkerchief damp with what might have been diluted orange juice, surveyed the tableau with the detached curiosity of a seasoned absurdist. The Parisian boulevard was, to put it mildly, a sticky predicament. A viscous, multicolored effusion of former seminar attendees adhered to the cobblestones, punctuated by the occasional errant shoe.

"So," he squeaked, his voice a fractured melody of bewilderment and synthetic laughter. "This is the 'Deconstructing Dessert' symposium? Seems... intensely experiential."

Professor Auguste Fromage, his spectacles now shimmering with an unsettling luminescence, beamed. "Experience, Chocko, is the very crème de la crème of understanding! Observe! The uninhibited dissolution! The palpable release of form!"

He gestured towards the sugary morass. "Jean-Pierre, still clinging to... beige! Even in a state of advanced liquefaction!"

Chocko's painted eyebrows furrowed. He'd invested a considerable sum in this. He'd anticipated a more... structured deconstruction. Perhaps a thoughtful discussion of the semiotics of sponge cake, a controlled demolition of a petit four. Not... this wholesale deliquescence.

"I paid for instruction," he honked, extending a gloved hand towards the goo. "Not a public meltdown. And where, pray tell, is the reimbursement?"

Auguste waved a dismissive hand, leaving a shimmering trail of what appeared to be spun sugar. "Reimbursements are... conceptually fluid. The funds have been...

repurposed. Primarily for the acquisition of industrial-strength blotting paper. For... interpretive purposes."

Chocko sighed, a sound like air escaping a novelty whoopee cushion. He'd sensed a certain... unconventionality when the syllabus included "The Existential Angst of Éclairs." Collaborating with an artist who believed that the inherent instability of meringue was a metaphor for the human condition rarely culminated in practical skill acquisition.

Suddenly, a small, perfectly preserved kumquat rolled across the slick pavement, coming to rest against Chocko's oversized clown shoe.

"What's this, then?" he inquired, gingerly picking it up. It exuded a faint aroma of citrus and existential unease.

Auguste's eyes widened, his shimmering spectacles intensifying. "The counter-agent! Magnifique! It appears the temporal... congealing is commencing."

Chocko examined the kumquat. It felt strangely significant, a tiny sphere of order in a universe of dissolving pastries. He looked at Auguste, then at the shimmering heap of former students. A peculiar glint ignited in his painted eyes.

"You know what?" he honked. "Seems there's an opening in the advanced 'Gravity and Ganache' workshop. No prior disintegration experience necessary." He gestured towards the open window.

Auguste, momentarily distracted from the philosophical implications of nougat's entropy, stared at Chocko with a mixture of artistic appreciation and dawning dread. "Le jeu," he murmured, a faint smile, not entirely composed of sugar, playing on his lips. He then clambered onto the windowsill and, with a final dramatic flourish, plummeted towards his dissolving disciples in the Parisian street below. The faint scent of ozone mingled with the distinct aroma of caramelized ambition and slightly damp clown attire. And somewhere, in a parallel dimension, Baroness Von Yeast was meticulously sifting

sawdust, muttering about the philistines and their lamentable lack of appreciation for a truly structural scone.

Remembrance of Clowning's Past, or The Great Hoboken Exodus

The intricate tapestry of human folly is woven with threads of both the grand and the grotesque, the tragic and the utterly ridiculous. In the year of our Lord 2025, while the specter of societal control loomed large over the forgotten corners of urban landscapes, it was not in the halls of power or the battlefields of nations that the most poignant dramas unfolded, but rather in the neglected crevices where laughter had been weaponized and joy had become a taxable commodity. It is in this unlikely theater, amidst the flickering neon signs of a condemned Hoboken, that our tale of improbable escape commences, following the fortunes of a band of players whose painted smiles masked a profound and often unsettling truth about the human condition.

The cracked vinyl of the Cadillac's bench offered little resistance to Chocko's weight. Doestoevsky's String Quartet No. 8 in C minor, a scratched symphony from a bygone era of magnetic tape, emanated from the car's speakers, its melancholic strains – a profound lament for some unnamed sorrow – a fitting counterpoint to their desperate flight. Outside, the Hoboken cityscape presented itself as a smeared watercolor of industrial grime against a bruised dawn. Not the kind of dawn celebrated in verse. More the variety indicative of widespread infrastructural collapse, an observation noted with detached amusement in Chocko's internal monologue – a baffling synthesis of affected ennui, grandiloquent pronouncements, absurdist asides, and cosmic indifference.

"Right then, you motley assemblage of societal debris!" Chocko projected, his vocal cords retaining a phantom echo of forced joviality from years spent under canvas. In the rear of the vehicle, a shifting mass of limbs and theatrical attire stirred. There were three: Shecky Moskowitz, a practitioner of mime whose anxiety manifested as a tremor that caused his facial makeup to appear as if viewed through disturbed water; Seymour "Sy" Krelboin, a manipulator of airborne objects whose dexterity peaked precisely after the ingestion of three milliliters of room-temperature gin; and Professor Irving Finkelstein,

a master of bodily contortion whose preferred forms defied both biological plausibility and aesthetic sensibility. Each a unique distillation of neurological variance.

Adjacent to Chocko, Princess Fluffybutt, a Python bivittatus of considerable length and dubious temperament, extended a bifid tongue towards the reflective surface of the rearview mirror. In the passenger seat, Bartholomew “Bilby” Bingley, designated the Moose Man, vocalized a low hum in approximate synchronization with the Doestoevsky. Bilby, distinguished by a magnificent natural growth of cervine antlers and a predilection for rendering landscapes in oil, dabbed with nervous precision at a canvas supported on his lap.

Abruptly, the quartet’s somber tones were fractured by a high-pitched vocalization from the car's aft section. “They are in pursuit!” Sy Krelboin declared, his face a mask of alarm as he peered through a tear in the convertible’s fabric roof. “I observed a small aerial vehicle! Its movements suggested a high degree of caffeine consumption!”

Chocko’s ocular sensors registered the receding cityscape in the mirror. Indeed, a dark pinpoint resolved itself against the urban backdrop. His lower extremity exerted increased pressure on the accelerator pedal. The Cadillac, a legacy from his maternal grandmother’s fleeting union with a minor figure in the national pastime of baseball, responded with a low groan but increased its forward momentum. The Doestoevsky gave way to the percussive opening of The Doors’ “Peace Frog” – "Blood in the streets in the town of New Haven," the raw energy of the music underscoring their perilous journey. Chocko maintained a meticulously ordered auditory escape plan.

“Commence with the implementation of contingency protocol Beta!” Chocko enunciated, his internal pronouncements echoing with an almost bureaucratic precision. “Or perhaps contingency Gamma, given our rather... improvisational approach to strategic considerations.”

“Contingency Beta involves the primates, does it not?” Shecky Moskowitz vocalized, his painted features conveying profound unease.

Contingency Beta did indeed involve the primates. Specifically, three specimens of Sapajus apella, each adorned in faded facsimiles of attire associated with a mid-twentieth-century musical quartet – a soiled green garment on one, a surprisingly accurate purple ensemble on another, and the third bearing a perpetually bewildered expression. These creatures were survivors of a regrettably conceived "Primate Musical Extravaganza" at the now-defunct "Tent of Transient Dreams."

As they traversed Hoboken's increasingly inflamed thoroughfares, Professor Irving Finkelstein, emitting a series of creaks indicative of skeletal distress, unfolded himself from the confines of the rear seat and ascended to the vehicle's hood. Through a sequence of unexpectedly fluid movements, he manipulated the trunk's locking mechanism. The primates, previously maintaining a state of relative quiescence, emitted excited chattering sounds as Professor Irving Finkelstein distributed to them small projectile devices pre-loaded with brightly colored spheres utilized in juggling routines.

"Initiate simian projectile dissemination!" Chocko announced, his inner voice approximating the frenetic energy of journalistic hyperbole.

The subsequent sequence unfolded with chaotic velocity. As "Peace Frog" reverberated, the Cadillac accelerated through the burning streets, its progress marked by the buzzing of pursuing aerial vehicles. Precariously positioned on the hood, Professor Irving Finkelstein directed the primates' efforts, their small limbs launching a multicolored barrage towards their mechanical adversaries. The spheres, possessing an unexpected disruptive effect on the delicate rotating elements of the drones, resulted in several plummeting into the conflagration.

But the urban environment was constricting. High-velocity projectiles impacted the Cadillac's rear chrome section. A larger aerial vehicle, exhibiting characteristics of an attack configuration, materialized on the horizon, its silhouette a stark contrast to the unfolding absurdity.

The auditory input shifted abruptly. Miley Cyrus's pronouncement of global termination, "End of the World," filled the vehicle's interior. "If you're gonna go, I'm gonna go," the

defiant lyrics echoing their desperate determination. An appropriate sonic backdrop, Chocko mused, his internal observer noting the tragicomic elements of their predicament.

"Bilby, esteemed associate," Chocko stated, his vocal tone surprisingly even amidst the pandemonium. "The Serpentes!"

Bilby acknowledged with a nod, his antlers exhibiting a slight vertical oscillation. He carefully manipulated the lid of a large woven container positioned at his feet. Approximately twelve reptiles of varying species, ranging from non-venomous colubrids to a particularly truculent-looking Boa constrictor, emerged from within. With surprising adroitness, Bilby began to gently propel the reptiles through the vehicle's open apertures.

The individuals wielding projectile weapons, taken aback by the sudden appearance of the Serpentes, experienced a temporary degradation in targeting accuracy. The larger aerial vehicle, its operator evidently possessing an aversion to reptiles, executed a series of erratic maneuvers.

"Alright, fun's over, where were you the night of the rubber chicken incident?" barked a voice from behind a blindingly bright light. Chocko, still in full face paint and surprisingly comfortable in his oversized shoes despite the manacles, squinted. A dozen serious faces in tactical gear stared back. "And these so-called 'exploding whoopee cushions' – care to elaborate?" Another voice, lower and more menacing. Suddenly, Chocko found himself shoved into a lineup. Next to him stood a mournful-looking clown in a droopy red nose, a clown with an inexplicably long unicycle strapped to his back, and one attempting to juggle flaming bowling pins with a distinct lack of success. "Any last requests, fellas?" a gruff voice inquired. A swat team member offered a banana. The mournful clown peeled it slowly. Then, a cut to Chocko and the others, now in striped jumpsuits, lugging enormous bags of... something... while a guard whistled a jaunty, yet somehow sinister, tune.

Precisely as their probability of continued existence appeared to be diminishing, they reached the periphery of Hoboken. The Pulaski Skyway loomed, a concrete conduit promising egress to an alternative geographical location – or at minimum, a location exhibiting a less pronounced odor of burning theatrical wigs and civic decay.

As they propelled themselves onto the elevated roadway, leaving the incandescent remains of Hoboken behind, Chocko directed his gaze rearward. The urban center was now a substantial conflagration, a testament to the inherent illogicality of their existence and the liberating, albeit disordered, escape they were executing.

"Well," Chocko articulated, a trace of world-weary observation entering his internal monologue. "That was, without doubt... a discrete narrative segment." He extended an appendage and increased the auditory output. The concluding, assertive chords of Miley Cyrus's composition resonated across the aquatic expanse. The cessation of existence, or at least Hoboken's, had transpired, and Chocko the clown and his improbable cohort were advancing into an ambiguous and uncertain future dawn.

The brake lights flared, a sudden crimson punctuation mark in the rearview mirror. The engine sputtered, a final, exhausted exhalation. A single playing card, the Joker, fluttered from the dashboard and landed face up on the floor.

The wind carried the faint scent of cotton candy and something acrid, like burnt dreams. A carousel horse, painted a garish gold, lay half-submerged in the murky water of the canal. Its glass eye stared blankly at the indifferent sky. And as the faint echoes of laughter and the distant glow of the burning city receded into memory, one was left with the distinct impression that while the absurd decree of their captivity had ended in flames, the fundamental absurdity of their existence, like the indifferent turning of the world itself, would undoubtedly continue, perhaps even find a strange sort of joy in the open road ahead.

Art House Confessional

By Shabby Genteel

I walked into the Art House Gallery
on Shattuck, where the air was thick
with the smell of cheap beer and sweat,
and the kids were all wearing irony
like a second skin, layered and peeling.

They laughed at nothing, or maybe
at everything—detached, gleeful,
toothless in their camp, their eyes
glinting under the flicker of strobes.

I played my EP, pressed from a Dollar Tree
ice cream freezer in Belmont,
the sound warped and thin,
but they swayed anyway,
like it was some kind of hymn.

A man rolled on the floor,
wrapped in a Persian rug,
his body a blur under the lights,
and for a second, it felt real—
not a joke, not a pose,
just something raw and unhinged.

Then it was over.
One and done.
u know how it goes.

Ah, Orono! A hamlet nestled amidst the vast and indifferent tapestry of existence, where the mundane rituals of cleanliness become a stage for the fleeting dramas of humanity. Tonight, under the cold, unwavering gaze of the Maine stars, we shall witness a tableau both curious and unsettling, a brief flicker in the grand, shadowed theater of being. Observe, mes amis, and tremble at the enigma that is...

The Orono Anomaly: A Hugo Ritz Event

By Tamara Clarkson

The man stood. His blue double-breasted jacket, a textile anomaly, contained him. Black dress pants draped from his waist, bisecting his form. A floral shirt patterned his torso. A black bow tie adhered to his collar. Aviator glasses rested upon the bridge of his nose. He held a bound collection of printed pages. His other hand manipulated a small, illuminated device against a larger, inoperative entertainment unit. A translucent vessel containing a pale liquid sat on a horizontal surface nearby.

The jacket bulged, a cerulean carapace straining against unseen forces. The pants whispered against each other with each minute shift. The floral fabric pulsed with a silent, internal vibrancy. Snap! The bow tie seemed to defy gravity, a black exclamation point of questionable intent. The lenses of the glasses reflected nothing but stark fluorescent hum. The crimson stain spread across the... silent screen of the pinball machine, a digital ghost of a forgotten explosion.

A single playing card, the Queen of Spades, lay face down on the linoleum, its secrets pressed against the cold surface. The air hummed with the static of unspoken anxieties. A faint scent of ozone and regret clung to the discarded lint. He watched her disappear into the fog, a phantom trailing... the echo of a laughter that had never been uttered.

The observer noted the angle of the man's head as he perused the pages. The slight tremor in his hand as he held the recording device. The almost imperceptible pursing of his lips before he imbibed from the translucent vessel. The room smelled of industrial detergent and a faint undercurrent of something sweet, artificial.

His gaze locked onto the printed word, a laser beam of intellectual intensity. The recording device pulsed with captured sonic fragments. The pale liquid slid down his gullet, a volatile cocktail of unknown consequence.

A child's lost mitten lay abandoned beneath a metal chair, its emptiness a tangible ache. The fluorescent lights flickered with a silent Morse code of despair. A whisper, like the rustling of dry leaves, spoke of doorways that led nowhere.

The woman approached. Her skin possessed a warm, umber tone. Her eyes registered the man's unusual attire with a flicker of... something unreadable. Her hand gestured, a slow, deliberate arc. Words formed, sound waves propagating through the air.

She moved with the fluid grace of a predator, her gaze a sharp, assessing instrument. Her voice sliced through the hum of the machines, a verbal rapier thrust.

A tangle of discarded telephone wires in the corner pulsed with phantom conversations. The shadows lengthened and contorted, mimicking forgotten arguments. The taste of cinnamon and dust filled the unseen corners of the room.

The Curio Catalog: Hugo Ritz Edition

One (1) Houston White blue double-breasted jacket (size: indeterminate, condition: seemingly enthusiastic).

One (1) pair black Chaps dress pants (crease: debatable, emotional state: possibly resigned).

One (1) floral shirt (pattern: riotous, volume: subdued by outer layers).

One (1) black bow tie (orientation: slightly askew, existential query: palpable).

One (1) pair aviator glasses (lens clarity: functional, philosophical implications: vast).

One (1) copy New York Times Review of Books (edition: current, relationship to reader: intense).

One (1) small recording device (status: active, purpose: enigmatic).

One (1) broken Star Wars pinball machine (state: inert, sonic afterlife: in progress).

One (1) translucent vessel (contents: Lecher's Microbrew Carbonated & Caffeinated Lemonade, potential energy: considerable).

Assorted unfolded socks (number: indeterminate, level of existential angst: high).

One (1) handful of brightly colored flu pills (potential function: medicinal, symbolic weight: questionable).

To observe this man in this space is to witness a confluence of disparate elements, each vibrating at its own peculiar frequency. The jacket, a bold statement against the utilitarian backdrop. The pinball machine, a silent monument to a galaxy far, far away in the humdrum reality of Orono. The socks, scattered like fallen leaves of domesticity. And the man himself, a curious catalog of sartorial choices and focused intent, a fleeting inhabitant of this liminal space between clean and dirty. What unseen forces propel him? What grand narrative unfolds within the confines of this laundromat? The fluorescent lights offer no answers, only a stark illumination of the surface.

"You know," Hugo might have said to the African Cuban woman, adjusting his bow tie with grave seriousness, "the existential dread of a missing button is far more profound than that of a lost galaxy. At least you can buy another galaxy."

Later, while meticulously photographing a particularly dense passage in the Review of Books, he might have muttered, "The irony of deconstructing narrative while simultaneously creating a very strange one in a laundromat is not lost on me. Mostly because I keep finding lost socks."

Regarding the broken pinball machine, he might have deadpanned, "It's a metaphor for unfulfilled potential. Or maybe it just needs a new flipper."

And as he swallowed his Lecher's Microbrew Carbonated & Caffeinated Lemonade, a look of profound contemplation on his face, he might have declared, "The subtle notes of hops really bring out the inherent tragedy of needing clean underwear."

The encounter, the photography deal, the flu pills – all unfolded with a detached precision punctuated by these sudden, illogical pronouncements, leaving a lingering sense that beneath the surface of the ordinary, something deeply strange, and perhaps even hilarious in its strangeness, was quietly transpiring.

No Expiration

By Zak Hamacher

The Northern Blight Pediatric Behavioral Center exhaled a sigh of recycled air. Shabby Genteel, a man whose middle age had manifested as a permanent slump and the faint aroma of industrial-strength hand sanitizer, leaned against the locked door of the dayroom. Outside, the muffled shouts of staff attempting to coax a small pyro from the padded cell echoed with the comforting regularity of a faulty metronome. Lockdown persisted.

“Mr. Shabby,” a voice, small and unnervingly precise, belonged to Luna. Her gaze, fixed on some invisible geometry in the linoleum, held the stillness of a taxidermied bird. “Tell us about the dead clown.”

Shabby pushed off the door. “Gabby Barnacle,” he corrected, the name a dry rasp in the humid air. “Lady of Oy. Though why ‘Oy,’ nobody rightly knew. Probably a clerical error. Like my continued employment here.” He paused, offering a thin smile that didn’t quite reach his weary eyes. “Died 1887. Buried on Hart Island. Mass grave situation. You know how it is. Unclaimed baggage.”

Finn, a boy whose inner world seemed perpetually rendered in sharp angles and unsettling textures, tilted his head. “Why a clown?”

“Ah, that’s the million-dollar question, isn’t it?” Shabby mused, scratching the back of his neck. “Or maybe just the slightly soiled dollar-fifty question. My father, Chocko the Clown – yes, professionally. Bozo-adjacent, let’s say. Every third Thursday, religiously, we’d head down to the ferry. Gazebo near the dock. That was the perimeter. No further access. Official policy. Something about…biohazards. Or maybe just general unpleasantness.”

He shifted his weight. “Chocko, though. He had a...fixation. On Gabby. Said she deserved a proper send-off. For a clown. In a mass grave. The irony wasn’t lost on him, I assure you. He appreciated a good, low-stakes irony.”

A preteen named Agnes, whose fingers continued their meticulous braiding of a frayed blanket, finally spoke. “He went to her grave?”

“Oh, he went,” Shabby confirmed, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial murmur. “Arrangements were made. Unorthodox arrangements. Let’s just say Riker’s Island has a surprisingly robust alumni network willing to engage in extracurricular activities for the right price. And a few strategically placed sawbucks. Joe and Felix. Looked like they’d lost a staring contest with a concrete mixer. They weren’t sentimental types. But Chocko...he could be persuasive. Especially with the promise of...well, let’s just say it involved a surprisingly detailed diagram of the prison commissary.”

He painted the scene with a few economical gestures. “Fog thick as pea soup that Thursday. Rowboat procured. Shrouded figures landing on Hart Island. The clink of shovels. The groan of old wood. And then...Gabby.”

Shabby paused, letting the image settle in the sterile air. “Full clown regalia. Not a speck of dust on the ruffles. Makeup pristine. White face, exaggerated eyebrows, the painted smile frozen in a rictus of eternal amusement. And the nose. Bright red. Like a...well, like a clown nose. And she was holding a pie. Cream pie. Looked freshly baked. Untouched by the ravages of time. Or decomposition. Go figure.”

Luna’s small hand tightened on her plush rabbit. Finn’s gaze sharpened, as if trying to dissect the impossibility of it all.

“Chocko, he just stood there,” Shabby continued, a faint, almost wistful smile touching his lips. “No big pronouncements. No tears. Just...recognition. He’d brought my old Walkman. Popped in Mazzy Star. ‘Fade Into You’ echoing across the muddy flats. Joe and Felix, they looked like they’d stumbled into a particularly grim punchline they didn’t

understand. Harper, the guard Chocko had...engaged...he even produced a flask. Shared a few sips. Then they gathered some weeds. Pathetic little bouquet. Laid it in the coffin with Gabby and her inexplicable pie. And they buried her again. Clown suit, makeup, cream filling and all."

The fluorescent lights hummed, an indifferent witness to the strange tale. The silence in the dayroom stretched, elastic and thick with unspoken questions. Then, the intercom crackled to life.

"Code Yellow clear. Lockdown lifted. All units resume standard protocols."

The children stirred, the enforced stillness dissolving like a forgotten dream. Luna looked up at Shabby, her expression unreadable. "Did you ever see her, Mr. Shabby?"

Shabby shook his head. "Just the gazebo. From the ferry. That was the punchline, I suppose. Getting so close, but never quite seeing the joke." He pushed himself upright. "Alright, you little agents of chaos. Let's go get some juice that tastes vaguely of metal and crackers that have achieved sentience."

As the children filed out, Finn remained behind for a moment, his gaze fixed on Shabby. "What kind of pie do you think it was?"

Shabby shrugged. "Probably the kind that defies all known laws of physics and pastry. You know. The incorruptible kind." He offered another of his thin smiles. "The best kind."

He watched Finn finally follow the others, then leaned against the now-unlocked door, the faint scent of disinfectant clinging to the air. Lockdown lifted. But some stories, he knew, had a way of lingering, like the faint, unsettling aroma of a cream pie that should have long since turned to dust.

Dwarf Clown, Palisades, New Jersey

By Ingram Blackwell

Ah, CHOCKO, a name that echoes now in the hallowed halls,
not of Brooklyn College, where grammar once bent to his will,
nor the flickering screen of Public Access, where latex bloomed
into fantastical beasts for bleary-eyed insomniacs.

But the poem, yes, that behemoth birthed from a black and white frame,
"Dwarf Clown, Palisades, NJ," a title weighty with unspoken tales.
Davidson's lens, a frozen moment, a small figure against the vastness,
ignited in CHOCKO a conflagration of verse, unspooling, unbound.

He saw more than the stoic stance, the painted smile a fragile mask.
He heard whispers of the Palisades' ancient stone, the silent river's flow.
He channeled the Miltonic echoes, a sonneteer of sawdust and spangles,
whose words, like cheap velvet, captured gaudy, grinning visages born in Tijuana.

And then the Bard, the Scottish play's dark prophecy, a sliver of ambition
lodged in the clown's heart, a yearning beyond the squeak of rubber.
"Sleep no more," perhaps the dwarf muttered in the echoing landscape,

a resonance CHOCKO amplified, twisted, made his own.

Bloom, the grand inquisitor of letters, saw the seismic shift,
declared it paramount, a landmark in the long march of American song.
The accolades rained down, a golden shower upon his greasepaint brow.
Pulitzer's weight, the National Book's embrace, the critics' fervent nod.

He traded lecture halls for the humid hush of a Tahitian dawn,
chalkboards for the tiny, intricate world of a flea circus, his own domain.
Imagine, CHOCKO, ringmaster of the minuscule, tamer of the teeming!
There, amidst the frangipani and the scent of salt, Leeteg appeared.

Black velvet his canvas, shadows his accomplice, and CHOCKO's burgeoning fortune,
a siren song leading to empty coffers, a betrayal painted in deepest night.
Then the scratching, the fevered skin, the insidious creep of Murine typhus,
a biological betrayal, the tiny performers turning vectors of doom.

Yet, even as the fevered visions danced behind his eyes, the final surge,
"Tahiti Fever Dream," a torrent of language, hallucinatory, incandescent.
The island's lushness warped, the fleas grown monstrous in his delirium,
a Noveau Roman landscape of shifting perspectives and phantom clowns.

Magic bled into harsh reality, the gonzo spirit untamed, unhinged,
a final, desperate act of creation as the body weakened, the mind soared.
The Nobel, a posthumous laurel, a recognition of the epic scope,
the personal tragedy transmuted into a universal lament, a fevered scream.

And the sea, vast and indifferent, received his ashes, a final, oceanic gesture.
CHOCKO, the clown, the teacher, the poet of improbable grandeur,
his words a swirling current, forever echoing the dwarf on the Palisades,
the velvet clowns of Tijuana, the whispers of Macbeth in a Tahitian night.

Citations

Cornici, Antonella. "The Clown and His Therapeutic Play. Le Rire Médecin." In Clown Doctors: Shifting the Paradigm of Hospital Play, edited by Patch Adams, Maureen Flaherty, and Vera Maass, 57-72. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008.

Ehrlich, David. "How 'The King of Comedy' Proved Jerry Lewis Was a Great Actor." Rolling Stone, February 19, 2016. https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/how-the-king-of-comedy-proved-jerry-lewis-was-a-great-actor-204398/.